

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-11 INR-10 LAB-06

NSAE-00 RSC-01 SIL-01 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 L-03 NSC-10

PA-03 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-15 USIA-15 ACDA-19 IO-15 OC-06

CCO-00 INT-08 NIC-01 CG-00 OPR-02 SY-10 DRC-01 /172 W
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P 050030Z OCT 73

FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5247

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN JOSE 3550

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, ELAB, CS

SUBJ: ELECTRICAL WORKERS UNION CALLS STRIKE

REF: SAN JOSE 2546

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: THE DEMOCRATIC ELECTRICAL WORKERS UNION (SITET) CALLED ITS LONG POSTPONED STRIKE AGAINST ICE ON OCTOBER 3. FEW WORKERS AT ICE JOINED THE WALKOUT, HOWEVER, AND ELECTRIC AND TELEPHONE SERVICE CONTINUES TO BE NORMAL. WHILE SEVERAL DEMOCRATIC UNIONS IN LIMON DID STAGE A SYMBOLIC 1-HOUR STOPPAGE IN SYMPATHY FOR SITET ON OCTOBER 3, THE EMBASSY VIEWS THE ODDS AGAINST THE SUCCESS OF THE STRIKE AS OVERWHELMING. END SUMMARY.

2. THE ELECTRICAL WORKERS UNION (SITET) DECLARED A "STRIKE OF INDEFINITE DURATION" OCTOBER 3 AGAINST ICE, THE AUTONOMOUS STATE COSTA RICAN ELECTRICAL INSTITUTE, TO BACK UP ITS TWO-MONTH DEMANDS THAT ICE REINSTATE EIGHT UNION ACTIVISTS FIRED FOR THEIR PART IN AN ABORTIVE ILLEGAL STRIKE IN JUNE. THE EFFECT OF THE STRIKE AT ICE ITSELF SEEMS MINIMAL AND ELECTRIC POWER AND TELEPHONE SERVICE HAS NOT BEEN INTERRUPTED. A HANDFUL OF ICE WORKERS DID TEMPORARILY LEAVE THEIR JOBS IN LIMON
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AND PUNARENAS, BUT WORKERS AT ICE'S INSTALLATIONS IN

TURRIALBA DID NOT HEED THE STRIKE CALL AT ALL. IN SAN JOSE, THE UNION LEADERS, AWARE THAT FEW WOULD SUPPORT A WALKOUT, HAVE NOT, AS FAR AS THE EMBASSY IS AWARE, CALLED FOR A STOPPAGE. THE PTTI REPRESENTATIVE TOLD THE EMBASSY ON OCTOBER 4 THAT SITET HAD ORDERED ONE OF ITS MEMBERS IN THE MAIN SWITCHING STATION IN SAN JOSE TO CUT OFF ALL POWER TO THE CITY, BUT THAT FOR SOME REASON THE INDIVIDUAL DID NOT CARRY OUT HIS TASK. HE SUSPECTED, HOWEVER, THAT SITET MIGHT TRY AGAIN TO BLACK OUT THE CITY.

3. THE ONLY SUBSTANTIVE SUPPORT FOR SITET'S STRIKE CALL CAME IN THE FORM OF 1-HOUR SYMPATHY WALKOUTS OCTOBER 3 BY SEVERAL UNIONS IN LIMON, INCLUDING THE RECOPE OIL REFINERY WORKERS AND THE JAPDEVA PORT WORKERS, WHICH ARE, LIKE SITET, AFFILIATED TO THE DEMOCRATIC LABOR CONFEDERATION (CCTD).

4. AT MID-DAY OCTOBER 4, RADIO STATIONS BROADCAST A TAPED MESSAGE FROM SITET SECRETARY-GENERAL GUIDO NUNEZ WHO HAS JUST GONE INTO HIDING TO ESCAPE FEARED ARREST, ALONG WITH UNDECA SECRETARY-GENERAL FERNANDO ANGULO. (NUNEZ WAS THE TARGET OF A BLISTERING TELEVISION ATTACK BY PRESIDENT FIGUERES ON OCTOBER 3 (SEE REFTEL). NUNEZ REAFFIRMED SITET'S EARLIER STRIKE CALL AND WARNED THAT THE JAPDEVA, RECOPE, AND OTHER CCTD-AFFILIATED UNIONS WOULD JOIN THE WALKOUT IF ANY STRIKING ICE WORKERS WERE FIRED OR SITET LEADERS ARRESTED.

5. COMMENT: SITET'S STRIKE CALL IS CLEARLY AN ACT OF DESPERATION IN A BATTLE THE UNION'S LEADERS KNOW THEY CANNOT WIN. AT THIS JUNCTURE, ICE HOLDS ALL THE CARDS. NOT ONLY DOES ICE ENJOY THE EMPHATIC SUPPORT OF PRESIDENT FIGUERES, AND, IT APPEARS, OF PUBLIC OPINION, BUT ONLY A TINY PERCENTAGE OF ICE WORKERS THEMSELVES NOW SEEM DISPOSED TO LAY THEIR JOBS ON THE LINE. SITET SUFFERED AN ADDITIONAL BLOW ON OCTOBER 1 WHEN THE MEMBERS OF ASDEICE, A MARXIST-CONTROLLED RIVAL UNION AT ICE, WHICH HAD SEVERAL WEEKS AGO DECLARED IT WOULD

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JOIN SITET IN WALKOUT, VOTED OVERWHELMINGLY NOT TO STRIKE.

6. DESPITE THE IMPOSSIBLE ODDS, SITET'S LEADERS SAW NO ALTERNATIVE TO A STRIKE AT THIS TIME. THE UNION'S STRENGTH HAD DECLINED WITH EVERY WEEK THE STRIKE HAD BEEN DELAYED BECAUSE THE DECISIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL MOMENT HAD BEEN PASSED AND BECAUSE ICE WAS ABLE TO BRING

PRESSURE TO BEAR ON THE WORKERS. MOREOVER, FOR TWO MONTHS UNION LEADERS HAVE EXPLAINED THEIR DEMANDS THAT ICE REINSTATE THE EIGHT WORKERS IN LARGER TERMS AS A DEFENSE OF THE FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT OF LABOR UNIONS TO ORGANIZE FREELY IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR. TO ABANDON THE STRUGGLE WOULD HAVE BEEN A CRUSHING SELL-OUT OF THEIR WIDELY PROCLAIMED PRINCIPLES AND AN ADMISSION OF THEIR ORGANIZATION'S IMPOTENCE. FINANCIAL CONCERNS ALSO WEIGHTED HEAVILY IN THEIR DECISION TO STRIKE. THE UNION HAS BEEN PAYING THE SALARIES TO THE EIGHT WORKERS (A TOTAL OF 15,000 COLONES A MONTH) SINCE THEIR ADMISSAL. WHEN LAST WEEKEND PRESIDENT FIGUERES FINALLY ANNOUNCED, AS HAD BEEN EXPECTED ALL ALONG, THAT HE HAD BEEN UNABLE TO MEDIATE A SOLUTION TO THE CONFLICT, THE LEADERS FELT THEIR LAST PEACEFUL REMEDY HAD BEEN EXHAUSTED.
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